A close-up, sepia-toned photograph of a man with glasses, smiling broadly and looking upwards and to the right. He is wearing a dark, textured sweater over a white shirt. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The human services system is the
institutional expression of society's
compassion and desire to prevent
and alleviate suffering.

Compassion

We all want to prevent and alleviate suffering, and the human services system is an institutional expression of this compassion. Before Washington even achieved statehood, it had created compassionate institutions - an “insane asylum” was the first - whose purpose was to care for people who could not care for themselves.

Making Moral Progress • Over time, compassion, stimulated by advancing scientific knowledge, has led to important moral progress in the way we regard many of the client groups that use the human services system. We no longer believe, for instance, that epilepsy is the mark of the devil, that schizophrenia is the result of bad mothering, or that people with mental retardation should be locked away out of public view. We have come to see that people with disabilities deserve access to public facilities, and choices about where and with whom they live.

We don't often reflect on the progress that compassion has produced. Nor are we very articulate about how we balance compassion with fiscal responsibility. But it is in striking that balance that we shape government budgets and eligibility rules for human services programs. So this balancing act has a profound impact on the lives of children, adults and elders all across Washington - and on our own moral progress as a civilized society.

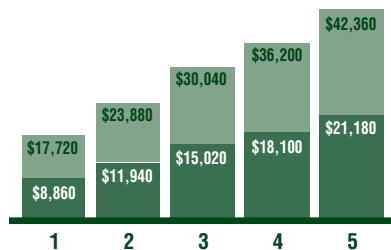
How Poor is Poor Enough? • How needy should people be before they qualify for government help? What are the ethical consequences of limiting access to mental health care, medical care, drug and alcohol treatment and other services?

Eligibility rules
express the
balancing of
compassion and
fiscal responsibility

Compassion

The federal government defines poverty. But how poor is poor enough to merit government help?

Poverty level by family size



The “federal poverty level” (FPL) is used to establish eligibility for many federal and state programs. The amount of the FPL is established by the federal government, and is based on the price of food. It rises as food prices rise. It does not take into account increases in the costs of other basic goods and services, which increase at a higher rate than food (such as health care or transportation) or that vary by community (such as housing). Therefore, FPL does not have an exact relationship to the income necessary to cover basic needs.

When program rules state that a person or family is eligible if they have an income of 100 percent of the FPL, it means that their income must be the same or less than the dollar amount of the FPL — \$8,590 per year for one person, for instance, or \$14,630 per year for a family of three.

For a list of eligibility levels for a variety of programs, see the chart on page 42.

Most of the services that DSHS finances or provides are available only to families or individuals who are low-income. Eligibility rules are often tied to federal funding and based on how far above or below the “federal poverty level” (FPL) a family is.

When budgets are tight and cuts must be made, it is common to reduce the income levels necessary to qualify for benefits. Families whose income is above the level necessary to be eligible - but still below the level needed to purchase services or insurance - do without, or rely on help from friends, family members or private charitable organizations.

Single-minded compassion for a specific group, to the exclusion of all others, creates a fragmentation of compassion that can lead to distortions in the funding of human services programs.

The Fragmentation of Compassion • But budgets are not driven by an objective, universal compassion. Effective advocacy makes a difference. Families and friends of people with developmental disabilities, the senior citizens’ lobby, and welfare rights advocates, for instance, all seek to increase the public’s and the legislature’s compassion for the specific

groups of people they represent.

Competition among these groups leads to a kind of fragmentation or balkanization of compassion. Single-minded compassion for a specific group, to the exclusion of all others, can narrow our vision and can lead to imbalances in the funding of human service programs.



Kathy Plonka photo reprinted with permission of *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane

Read the story, entitled, “Life Support,” that appeared in *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane on June 23, 2002 posted on the Internet at: <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/FacingtheFuture/NewsProfiles>.

Compassion

Some groups of human services clients have more powerful advocates that others. The senior lobby, for instance, is a major political force. Young offenders in the custody of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration, on the other hand, have virtually no advocates. These disparities in organized compassion lead to public policy that may not always represent the broader values of the general public.

Fortunately for all of us, compassion is expressed in many ways besides government-sponsored human service programs. Compassion motivates countless volunteers at food banks throughout the state. It drives the annual campaigns of United Way, the work of Habitat for Humanity, and the tutoring programs that help disadvantaged kids learn to read. All of our expressions of compassion are woven together to create the moral grounding of our communities, our families, and our government institutions.

**Compassion has
diverse rewards:
a sense of
connection with
others; a healthier
community; a
smile to brighten
the day**



Photo by Della Jordan

Russell Berg is a young man with cerebral palsy and a host of medical conditions. He is fed through a tube and he communicates mostly with eye contact and facial gestures. But he also has a smile that can light up a room. The resident of DSHS's Lakeland Village in Spokane uses friendliness, appreciation and other strengths to win the support and love of people around him.

Read the complete story posted on the Internet at: Facing the Future Profiles, located at <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/FacingtheFuture/NewsProfiles>